



A message from

# WESTMINSTER LABOUR

We're working for you in Westminster

28<sup>th</sup> January 2022

Vote Labour on 5 May!

Dear Charles,

I hope things are well with you. I'm writing regarding the Westminster property market's critical role in the international fight against corruption. This is an issue being brought into sharp focus in the context of potential sanctions on Russian oligarchs (re: Ukraine) and the fallout from recent events in Kazakhstan. The Westminster property market has also played an unfortunately prominent role in the recent revelations of the [Pandora Papers](#) and the recent Chatham House Research on the [UK's Kleptocracy Problem](#).

Weeding out these practices are not only important in terms of tackling crime, improving Westminster's reputation and making a positive contribution to the world, but the inflow of money of dubious or corrupt provenance distorts the free functioning of the local housing market. It also contributes to Westminster's issues with property under-occupation and (in certain cases) with empty homes. So I'd like to find out what the WPA is doing in a number of different areas here and I'd like to ask for your support on a couple of issues.

Firstly can I please confirm if the WPA is supportive of efforts to persuade the government to finally deliver the long-promised [Economic Crime Bill](#)? (I couldn't see any policy statement on this in the last few years on your website - sorry if I missed it). As I'm sure you know, in 2016 the government committed to delivering a beneficial ownership register for property and land, but implementation has been repeatedly delayed. This measure would make an enormous difference to the issues I've identified above so please can you send me a copy of any representations you have made on the matter and if you haven't previously written in support of the register of overseas entities that own UK property can I please ask that the WPA do so?

In relation to this I would also just briefly draw your attention to the Labour Group's existing commitment to end access to discretionary planning support [\(such as planning performance agreements and pre-application advice\) to developments that are unable to disclose their beneficial ownership](#). I hope this is something that you'd support, irrespective of the outcome of the election in May. Can you please let me know if you do?

 **Labour**  
for Westminster

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Can I please clarify what guidance you give to your members and the wider industry in Westminster about complying with both the letter and the spirit of the National Crime Agency's [Suspicious Activity Reports](#)? Failure to fulfil these obligations has been a major issue raised by both independent anti-corruption organisations, the NCA and other constituent members of the National Economic Crime Centre.

In addition to your response to these questions I'd be delighted to hear about any other initiatives the WPA has on tackling the unfortunate situation the Westminster property market finds itself in with regards to facilitating international kleptocracy.

Over the coming months my colleagues and I look forward to further discussions about how we'd want to see the council work with local partners around driving an economic recovery that delivers decent jobs for Westminster residents and makes our city a vibrant place to live; building the social and truly affordable housing we desperately need; and being at the forefront of the green transition. However given both domestic and international events it has never been more pressing that the UK takes action on corruption, with the Westminster property sector having an enormous role to play in those efforts.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards and thanks,

Councillor Adam Hug  
Westbourne Ward  
Leader of the Labour Group  
02076412230

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